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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#)  
SUBJECT: ABDULLAH DEFLATED

Classified By: Political Counselor Annie Pforzheimer for reasons 1.4 (b)  
) and (d).

11. (S) Summary: Ambassador Eikenberry met with Karzai, Abdullah and several of their key advisors separately on October 26 - 27. Each side expressed appreciation for our contacts with them and the opposite camp in support of the election process and at the same time, a possible political accommodation between the two sides that might obviate a difficult second round. Abdullah seemed saddened by his situation, but expressed an interest in overcoming the election standoff for the good of the country. Ambassador pressed him hard against his advisor's pressure to boycott a second round. Ambassador urged Karzai to be magnanimous in his dealings with Abdullah and stressed the need for the second round to be credible. Ambassador told Wolesi Jirga Speaker Qanooni that Abdullah had to "step back from the ledge of declaring a boycott." Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan (HIA) Chairman Arghandewal told Ambassador that Karzai should shun any deal with Abdullah; while Karzai advisor Sanjar said that Karzai will not make a deal based on Abdullah's "list" of demands. End Summary

Abdullah Looks Forward

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12. (S) On October 26, Abdullah held a press conference where he issued 15 demands for the second round election. Ambassador Eikenberry met with Dr. Abdullah on October 27 to discuss his demands and the way forward. The mood was sober and Dr. Abdullah seemed saddened. He was recovering from a root canal the day before, and joked that he also suffered from "the political flu." The Ambassador told Abdullah that the international community (IC) was disappointed that Abdullah's demands were putting the process into question. He said that some Abdullah advisors had selfish reasons for advising him to take this compromising position, especially after he had gained the respect of the IC for his restraint and positive campaign during the first round.

13. (S) Abdullah voiced concern that without "at least some" of his demands being met, the Afghan people would not believe in the elections process enough to vote. He said his advisors had strong opinions, but it was his followers who had convinced him of this move. Abdullah said he had three choices: 1) strike a deal with Karzai that would meet a "reasonable amount" of his demands, and then to proceed to the second round, 2) "swallow the bitter pill" and boycott the elections, or 3) if nothing was done, continue with the process anyway.

14. (S) Ambassador Eikenberry noted that a boycott would lead to Karzai winning, regardless, and would only put Abdullah in a weakened position. Instead, he could consider his long-term political future, where he could play a constructive role perhaps as the leader of a loyal opposition, or another position of importance. Abdullah noted that he had a lengthy history of working with Karzai, and over this period of time had realized that there was no hope for real change with Karzai. Therefore, an agreement at

this stage would be "very difficult." He said if he did not feel strongly about this, he would not have "volunteered for this most difficult of jobs." However, Abdullah did express interest in overcoming this elections standoff for the good of Afghanistan.

#### Open Door to Talks

15. (S) Karzai Chief of Staff Omar Daudzai informed us shortly after this meeting that Karzai was amenable to meeting Abdullah with no preconditions. Abdullah subsequently confessed that he also agreed to the meet. (As of the evening of October 27, the two sides were converging on an agreement over a "neutral venue.") The Ambassador advised Abdullah to focus not on the next two weeks, but rather the long-term future of Afghanistan when talking to Karzai

#### MFA Spokesman Comments on Abdullah's Demands

16. (U) When asked about Abdullah's demands at an October 27 press conference, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesman Hamidzada said that if his demands were within the limits of Afghan law, they are fine. If they were not within those limits, they are not fine. Regardless, he said Abdullah's demands do not matter as the issue will be resolved by a second round election.

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Karzai Thanks Us for Abdullah Intervention; We Urge Magnanimity

17. (S) Ambassador met alone with President Karzai mid-morning on October 27 for about an hour, focusing on the elections. Karzai appreciated the Ambassador's interventions with Abdullah supporters (Rabbani, Qanooni, and Massoud) in which Eikenberry had stressed the need for Abdullah to stay with the process, keep his demands reasonable, and "pull back from the ledge." Karzai said that he also appreciated the Ambassador's comments in the media that the U.S. was not pushing a coalition government. The Ambassador noted that Abdullah wanted some of his key ideas about devolving central government power included in a future unity platform, and was not only motivated by a desire for ministries. Karzai pointed out that Abdullah's supporters, on the other hand, were strongly motivated both by an immediate desire for power and also by the desire to make Abdullah self-destruct so they would not have to deal with him as a future national political figure and threat to their own power. The Ambassador urged Karzai to be magnanimous because his own political position was so much stronger than Abdullah's; Karzai responded that he had concerns about speaking to Abdullah directly because he would impose preconditions and because Abdullah might make their discussion public.

18. (S) The Ambassador told Karzai that the U.S. not only is admonishing Abdullah to stay with the process, we are making another key point, publicly and privately -- the second round must be credible. The security ministries, recent assertion that they could support 1000 more polling sites than the IEC had originally suggested (and almost 500 more than on August 20) was completely unsubstantiated by the idea that the country was "more secure" than during the first round. He advised Karzai to call IEC Chairman Ludin to hear his recommendation, which in the end should reflect both the security assessment and the IEC and UN's technical judgment of how many sites to open. He pointed out to Karzai that insecure sites were the most vulnerable to fraud, so while we sympathized with the discussion about Pashtun enfranchisement

we could not support any action which would call the legitimacy of the election into doubt. He said that if sites were opened without both candidates having agents present, the system should require an automatic audit to remove any concerns or doubts; Karzai agreed to this option.

#### Meetings with Key Advisors

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To Qanooni: Abdullah Needs to "Step Back from the Ledge"

¶9. (S) In a private dinner on October 26, Ambassador told Wolesi Jirga Speaker Qanooni that Abdullah had to "step back from the ledge" because his demands were too extreme, using them as a pretext to boycott the election would diminish, but not derail the election process. Qanooni, who said he was on good terms with both Abdullah and Karzai (although known to be in Abdullah's inner circle) asked what the U.S. wanted to see in terms of a deal. The Ambassador reiterated that the U.S. wanted to defend the constitution and the elections, and that if Abdullah boycotted the process he would "lose everything." As the loser of the 2004 elections, Qanooni alleged that the country had become more divided in the five years of Karzai's rule and that his own supporters had been methodically pushed out of government positions, and asked "can we afford five more years of Karzai?" He said that Karzai felt that he did not need to give Abdullah anything in a negotiation - and that both sides were being counseled badly. Abdullah, he thought, should be pushing for some of his key ideas to be adopted at least in small ways, such as having qualified and clean governors and cabinet ministers appointed via consultation with Parliament. Qanooni promised to convey to both candidates the Ambassador's unequivocal message that history would judge this group of politicians harshly if they do not complete the election process in a manner consistent with the constitution.

Arghandawal: Karzai Should Shun Abdullah Deal

¶10. (S) Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan (HIA) Chairman Arghandawal told Eikenberry on October 26 that he and his party have told Karzai of the need for a second round. They believe Karzai is certain to win and, therefore, should not make any deals with Abdullah. HIA is rallying their supporters to turn out for Karzai on election day. Arghandawal hopes participation will be strong.

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¶11. (S) Arghandawal voiced concern about the "arbitrary" way elections officials were deciding to close some polling centers. The Ambassador said it was important that too many centers not be opened as it would make fraud and security issues a significant issue again. Arghandawal said he and his supporters were dedicated to cracking down on fraud at least in districts where they have influence.

¶12. (S) Arghandawal said that a "political solution" was needed to deal with Hekmatyar and the Taliban. The issue is not them, he said, it is the Pakistanis. The Pakistanis are holding these groups "hostage" in their country - if they do not help the Pakistanis, and are on the terrorist black list, the Pakistanis threaten to send them to the Americans. They are "forced" to fight in Afghanistan by the ISI. On a recent trip to Pakistan by Arghandawal, the ISI offered to provide Arghandawal weapons and support to fight against the coalition presence, and criticized his HIA for working with the government.

Karzai Advisor: Criticizes Abdullah, Says Karzai Won't Deal

¶13. (S) Karzai advisor Sebghatullah Sanjar told poloff on October 27 that Karzai will not make a deal with Abdullah, at least not along the lines of Abdullah's 15 public demands. Sanjar questioned the quality of Abdullah,s advisors, arguing that whoever told him to make the list of impossible demands was putting him in a difficult position. He believes that Abdullah,s demands are "tantamount to announcing that he is the loser" and puts Abdullah in a difficult corner. Now either he will have to back down and appear weak, or withdraw. In either case, Abdullah loses, according to Sanjar.

¶14. (S) Sanjar said that the initial rumors that the West would support Abdullah (as part of a conspiracy) have all but died away. He said "hopefully" now Karzai will start believing the U.S. when they tell him that they are willing to work with him.

¶15. (S) According to Sanjar, the Taliban has agreed to support the election in parts of Afghanistan, such as Nangarhar, Helmand, Khowst and Paktia due to their Pashtun ethnic bias towards Karzai, and against the "Tajik" Abdullah. He said that they will keep the areas secure so voting can take place.  
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